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ABSTRACT

One of a series of work-based interviews about occupations in Australia, this booklet presents a personal interview with a customs officer about her job. The following questions are answered: what the customs officer does, what she likes about it, what kinds of things are smuggled, how various kinds of drugs and animals are smuggled, and how they are detected. Cartoons are used to enliven the material, and a glossary listing 26 words is included. Although designed to be used in literacy classes with adult new readers, the booklets are also appropriate for use with elementary and secondary students in career exploration and career education. (KC)

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Hazel Edwards'

Workdays

a day in the life of ...

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a Customs Officer

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Workdays

a day in the life of ....

a Customs Officer

Name Rita Ashwell

Aged Mature

Workdays
a day in the life of...
a Customs Officer

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WHAT KIND OF WORK DOES RITA DO?

Rita's job is to check people and baggage for anything *illegal*.

WHERE DOES SHE WORK?

She works at the International Airport. She's an *expert* people-watcher.

WHY ARE PEOPLE WATCHED?

Sometimes *foolish* passengers try to avoid paying *duty* on goods. So they try to hide goods in their luggage. And they don't declare them on the form.

WHAT KIND OF FORM DO YOU MEAN?

"A 'customs *declaration* form' must be filled in by everybody entering the country", explains Rita.

WHAT IS THE FORM FOR?

Certain *dangerous* goods are not allowed into Australia. Drugs, weapons and even some animals, plants and seeds are forbidden.

WHY ARE THESE GOODS FORBIDDEN?

This is to *protect* people. But it's also to protect Australian wildlife from *disease*.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE JOBS OF CUSTOMS, QUARANTINE AND IMMIGRATION?

Customs, *Quarantine* and Immigration staff work together. Goods entering or leaving the country interest Customs. Sometimes a duty or tax must be paid on legal goods. Illegal goods are stopped.

Anything which might carry disease interests Quarantine. Immigration is interested in why people enter the country. They check *passports* carefully.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT DRUG SMUGGLING?

Customs officers have strong views about drug smuggling. "Every time we stop drugs going through, we save lives", admitted Rita. "If you've seen someone badly *affected* by drugs, you'd never be a courier".

WHAT IS A COURIER?

A person secretly carrying illegal drugs is called a courier. If they get caught, they are fined or sentenced to prison.

DON'T SOME COURIERS DO LEGAL WORK?

Not all couriers are carrying something illegal.

WHAT DO THE LEGAL COURIERS CARRY?

Some couriers carry special letters or packages in brief cases chained to their arms.

WHY?

The chains are locked for safety. Often they carry important business letters between countries.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE PEOPLE WHO SMUGGLE LIVE BIRDS?

"Bird smugglers are dealers in death. 80% of smuggled wildlife dies in *transit*", says Rita who loves animals.

HOW ARE THE BIRDS SMUGGLED?

"It's so cruel. Sometimes drugged birds are pushed into plastic piping. They are *jammed* into suitcases. If the birds wake up in suitcases, they attack each other because they're scared".

8

HAVE YOU FOUND ANY SMUGGLED BIRDS?

"Once I heard a squeak. It came from the speaker box of a tape recorder. I opened it. Four drugged birds were hidden inside. The flight had been re-routed. One bird had woken up early", said Rita. Those bird smugglers were caught by Customs.

ARE RARE BIRDS ALLOWED TO LEAVE AUSTRALIA?

Rare birds are not allowed to leave Australia. Bird smugglers try to take rare birds out of the country. One woman had birds' eggs taped to her body. She was caught. So she smashed the eggs which had chicks inside.

WHO WANTS THE RARE BIRDS?

American bird collectors like Australian cockatoos.

WHAT WOULD BE PAID FOR A RARE BIRD?

They're willing to pay around $US20,000 per bird. That kind of money tempts a smuggler.

WHAT WOULD A BLACK COCKATOO COST?

One rare, black cockatoo will fetch around $US75,000 on the black market.

WHO WOULD BUY COCKATOOS AT THAT PRICE?

Rich private zoo owners might buy these. Private collectors might buy special birds or eggs to build up their collection.

WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND OTHER THAN BIRDS?

"I have found a smuggler with drugged *reptiles* strapped to his chest", said Rita.

WHAT ELSE DO THE SMUGGLERS CARRY?

People try to smuggle drugs, currency and even gold bars. Sometimes they hide illegal goods in their baggage. Sometimes they carry illegal goods in their clothes. Sometimes they carry illegal goods inside their bodies. "The stuffers and the swallowers", explained Rita. "If the container bursts inside, they die".

HOW DO CUSTOMS OFFICERS WORK?

International travellers all have to pass through Customs. "I look for lumps and bumps where they shouldn't be". She is *suspicious* of people wearing bulky clothes on hot days. Illegal goods may be hidden in secret pockets. Rita looks for something out of place.

I have to warn you Madam ... we have reason to believe you are carrying a false bottom.

CAN YOU GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF SOMETHING OUT OF PLACE?

"A well dressed man in a business suit carrying an old *backpack* on a flight from Bali, doesn't add up. Bali is usually a holiday place. The good suit and the old backpack don't fit together. So we'd take a closer look".

IS IT DIFFICULT TO TELL BETWEEN A NERVOUS, INNOCENT PERSON AND A GUILTY ONE?

"Body language tells us a lot. The way someone walks. How they behave when asked questions. With experience, we can tell". But Rita wouldn't tell us everything.

WHY NOT?

She doesn't want to warn smugglers how Customs catch illegal couriers.

DO SMUGGLERS TRY TO FOOL CUSTOMS?

"Smugglers use *chilli* or perfume to cover the smell of drugs. But the drug-detector dogs always find the drugs".

HOW DO THE DRUG-DETECTOR DOGS WORK?

Dogs smell the *baggage*. And they smell the passengers. The *dog-handler* trains the dog. Finding drugs is a game to the dog. The dog is not addicted to the drugs.

ARE THERE DOGS TRAINED FOR OTHER KINDS OF WORK?

There are 'passive' dogs who check passengers. If the dog smells something suspicious, he sits quietly beside the passenger. There are 'frantic' dogs who check baggage. If the dog smells something forbidden, the dog gets very excited.

CUSTOMS DEPT.
DOG SQUAD
NILL
GOODWIN

HOW IS THE 'FRANTIC' DOG CALMED?

The handler distracts the dog with a rolled up 'dummy'.

WHAT DOES THE DOG-HANDLER DO THEN?

Then he rewards the dog with a big game while other Customs officers move in.

WHAT DO THE CUSTOM OFFICERS DO?

Then Customs officers act.

WHERE ARE SOME OF THE PLACES SMUGGLERS HIDE GOODS?

"Diamonds have been hidden in shoes. *Currency* was hidden inside a stuffed teddy. Rare birds eggs were carried in a bra. This kept them at body temperature. Drugged lizards were taped together. Star tortoises

about 10cm long were hidden in jacket pockets. False bottoms in suitcases for currency or *steroids*. Shoulder pads with drugs inside", Rita explained.

ARE STEROIDS BANNED DRUGS?

Steroids are banned drugs.

HOW ARE THE STEROIDS USED?

Some body builders and athletes use them illegally.

WHY?

They want to build big muscles quickly.

ARE THERE SIDE EFFECTS?

There are bad side effects like nose bleeding, going bald and nightmares.

ARE THE STEROIDS LEGAL INTERNATIONALLY?

Internationally, some sports people use them. In some countries it is legal to make and use steroids.

WHAT ABOUT AUSTRALIA?

In Australia, it isn't.

WHEN DID THAT HAPPEN?

Since 1991, steroids are not allowed into Australia.

CAN FAKES BE MADE?

Fake steroids have been made. And animal steroids have been 'passed off' for human use. That's dangerous too.

WHERE HAVE STEROIDS BEEN HIDDEN?

Some steroids were hidden in a rolled up newspaper. Others were hidden in vitamin bottles.

ANYWHERE ELSE?

The box holding a stereo was x-rayed. They found steroids inside.

WHAT ABOUT LARGER QUANTITIES BEING SMUGGLED?

Smugglers also hid steroids in a suitcase.

WHERE?

It had a false lining. The false lining hid $30,000 worth of steroids.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SUITCASE?

The suitcase was so well made, Customs kept it.

WHY?

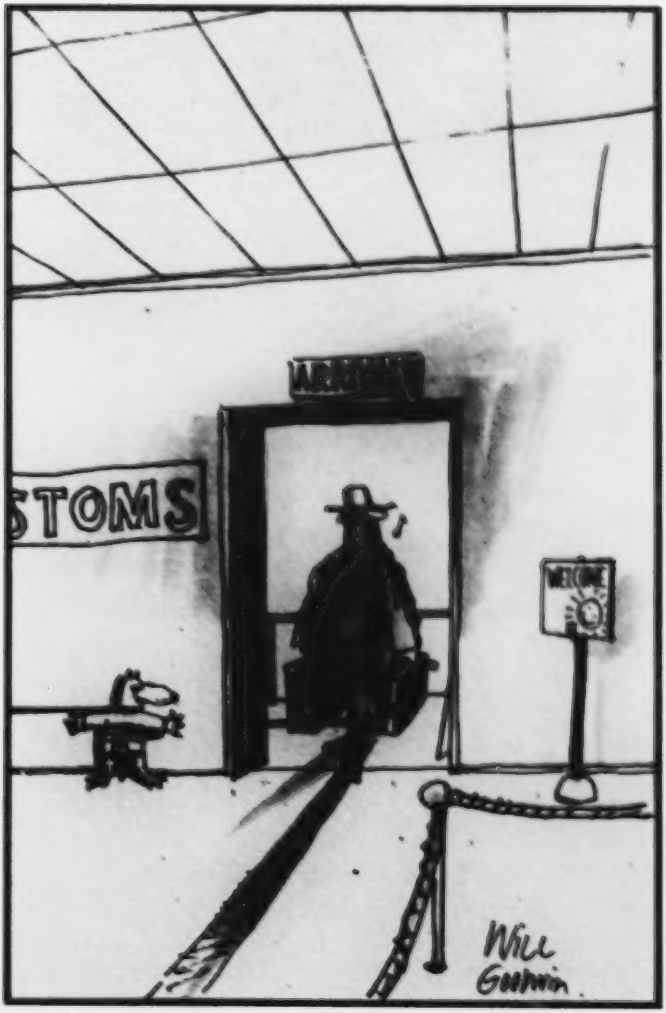
Now they use it when teaching new Customs officers.

WHAT WAS UNUSUAL ABOUT THE SUITCASE?

The case was heavy. That's why Customs noticed it.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE COURIERS?

Steroid couriers will be *prosecuted.* Fines are set at three times the street value of the drugs.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WHAT OTHER AMOUNTS OF DRUGS WOULD SMUGGLERS CARRY?

Another passenger had 30kg of heroin rolled inside Chinese scrolls in two suitcases.

WHAT OTHER PLACES WOULD DRUGS BE HIDDEN?

A Customs officer asked a passenger to open duty-free bottles. They were sealed and corked. But inside the bottles, hanging in the alcohol were the drugs.

DO YOU HAVE ANOTHER EXAMPLE?

A trick was done with an LP record. The drug dealers sliced an LP record in half. They put drugs between the two sides and joined them together.

WHAT OTHER REASONS DO PEOPLE SMUGGLE GOODS FOR?

"Europeans try to break quarantine by bringing in 'a piece of home' in bulbs, soil and plant cuttings. Asians try to bring in food", said Rita.

HAVE ANY FUNNY THINGS HAPPENED?

A woman passenger put a jar filled with large dried flies on the counter. Asked what she was going to do with the flies, she pointed to her throat. The flies were to catch the frog in her throat!

WHY IS IT ILLEGAL TO BRING IN PLANTS?

Smuggling grapevines is illegal because diseases may be spread. One woman tried to smuggle a grapevine into Australia.

HOW WAS THE GRAPEVINE DETECTED?

It was twisted in the shape of a coat hanger. She had her coat on the hanger. It hung over her arm. But the Customs officer noticed it!

WHAT HAPPENS TO GOODS TAKEN BY CUSTOMS?

If a passenger 'declares' the forbidden goods some may be returned if *appropriate* permits are obtained. Others are destroyed or re-exported.

WHAT HAPPENS IF A DECLARATION ISN'T MADE?

If you DO NOT declare plant or animals items in your luggage, you may be prosecuted.

CAN YOU BE FINED OR JAILED?

Fines go up to $50,000. Or you may be sentenced to jail for up to ten years.

DO PEOPLE TRY OTHER WAYS TO GET ILLEGAL DRUGS INTO THE COUNTRY?

Sometimes, illegal drugs are posted through the mail.

WOULD YOU GIVE AN EXAMPLE?

A set of ten calendars had LSD in the pages. The drugs were worth $300,000. In between, were sheets of blotting paper.

WHAT HAPPENED?

The senders were caught. So were the people who got the calendars.

WHAT ABOUT WEAPONS?

Ever been 'wanded down' at the *security scanner*?

WHAT IS A SECURITY SCANNER USED FOR?

The officer is checking for weapons. Customs has a collection of 'illegal' weapons which have been taken from passengers.

WHAT KIND OF WEAPONS?

Butterfly knives. *Nun-chucks*. Guns.

CAN YOU THINK OF ANYTHING ELSE?

There are strange 'gifts' such as stuffed cobras with *venom* glands and fangs.

ARE THERE SOME ITEMS THAT ARE NOT ALLOWED IN?

Often people buy gifts which are dangerous.

IS IT DELIBERATE?

Not usually. They don't think.

WOULD YOU GIVE AN EXAMPLE?

Toy guns which fire tiny balls could blind a child's eye. Of course, Customs keep these.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT WORKING FOR CUSTOMS?

"No day is the same", smiled Rita.

GLOSSARY

illegal	*not right or unlawful*
expert	*skilled*
foolish	*silly*
duty	*extra payment to bring goods into Australia*
declaration	*statement*
dangerous	*unsafe*
protect	*take care of or guard*
disease	*illness*
Quarantine	*isolation of animals for a period of time to prevent disease from being passed on*
passports	*identification papers for a citizen of a nation*
affected	*altered or impaired*
transit	*moving from one place to another*
jammed	*squashed together*
reptiles	*animals like snakes, lizards, and crocodiles*
suspicious	*suspects something is wrong*

GLOSSARY CONTINUED

backpack	*a bag designed to carry on the back*
chilli	*hot spice*
baggage	*cases or luggage*
dog-handler	*person who is in charge of a dog*
currency	*money*
steroids	*illegal drugs to build body muscles*
prosecuted	*sued in court*
appropriate	*apt or suitable*
security scanner	*an electronic frame to detect metal objects on people*
Nun-chucks	*2 wooden sticks linked by a chain*
venom	*poison*

Hazel Edwards'

Workdays

a day in the life of ...

A collection of simply written, work-based interviews, to give an insight into others' workstyles for beginning adult readers. The subjects were chosen to cover a range of occupations and workplace situations in Australia including the self-employed, franchisee, professional, trade and semi-skilled.

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